

OVERVIEW

The State of Arkansas has an estimated 350,000 persons with disabilities, disabilities being defined as impaired vision, impaired mobility, impaired communication, and impaired dexterity.

Pursuant to the lawsuit settlement agreement of May 22, 1997, and for the purpose of ensuring that all disabled persons legally eligible to vote in elections in the State of Arkansas may personally and secretly execute their ballots at the polling site, the State Board of Election Commissioners was charged with assisting the county election commissions in implementing the Title II requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and with monitoring compliance by the local election authorities.

The purpose of this overview is to provide assistance to the county election commissions in evaluating each of their county's polling sites for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

PARKING

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG), for the first 100 parking spaces, one (1) accessible parking space per 25 is required for on-site self-parking. This means that for every 25 parking spaces, one (1) space shall be designated as an accessible parking space. An accessible parking space may be designated either temporarily or permanently, but must be designated for the entire election day. An accessible space is required to have an access aisle. The access aisle must be adjacent to the parking space and marked off for loading and unloading from a vehicle. The accessible space must be marked with signage. The signage should be mounted 60" above the ground so as not to be obstructed by a vehicle. Accessible parking should be located on the closest accessible path of travel from the parking area to the accessible entrance of the polling site. If a curb is present in the accessible path of travel, then a curb ramp may be necessary.

ROUTE TO THE BUILDING

A disabled individual arriving at the polling site should be able to approach and enter the building as freely as a person without a disability. An accessible polling site will provide an accessible path of travel from an accessible parking location to an accessible entry to the building containing the polling site. At least one path of travel to the entrance of the facility should be accessible. This path of travel does not necessarily have to be the primary path of travel to the entrance of the facility. This path should be free of obstacles that cannot be detected by someone using a cane. In order to be detected by a cane, an object must be within 27" of the ground. Objects hanging or mounted

overhead must be higher than 80” to provide clear headroom. The path of travel should be a minimum of 36” wide to accommodate wheelchair users.

A curb on an otherwise accessible path of travel could present an insurmountable barrier for a person using a wheelchair or a walking aid. Curbs without a ramp cut will require a temporary ramp. The ramp must meet the criteria of a slope of 1:12. Slope is given as a ratio of height to length. A slope of 1:12 means that for every 12” along the base of the ramp, the height increases 1”. For a maximum slope of 1:12, at least 1’ of ramp length is needed for each inch of height.

Stairs along the path of travel may also present an insurmountable barrier for a person using a wheelchair or a walking aid. A temporary ramp may be needed to allow the person access to the entrance of the facility containing the polling site. Stairs up to 60” can be ramped to allow the person entrance into the polling site. Stairs over 60” may require an alternate path of travel, or possibly a portable or permanent platform lift to overcome the barrier. Using a secondary path of travel or service entrance as an alternate path of travel should be used as a last option. Ideally, voters with disabilities should be able to enter the polling site by the same entry as other voters.

ROUTE INSIDE THE BUILDING

There should be an accessible path of travel for disabled voters extending from the accessible entry to the building containing the polling site to the immediate voting area. Barriers/obstacles in the interior path of travel can present problems for disabled persons. Inaccessible stairs, ramps, and elevators, or narrow passageways may impede the disabled voter’s ability to reach the voting area to cast a ballot. Water fountains and bathrooms will not be covered, as they are not integral to casting a ballot.

Ramp requirements are the same for the interior of the building as for the exterior of the building. Ramps should not exceed a slope of 1:12 and the surface should be stable, firm, and slip resistant. If handrails are required, they should be placed on both sides of the ramp so as to allow an individual to grasp either one side or both. If doors are present at the top of a ramp, a level landing of 5’ x 5’ is required to allow a wheelchair to rest as the door is being opened.

If an elevator must be used to reach the voting area, it must be accessible. When approaching an elevator, the exterior call button should be centered no higher than 42” so that a wheelchair user can easily reach the call button by forward reach or by reaching from the side. The door of an elevator should have a clear width of 36” so that a wheelchair user or a person with a walking aid has a clear unassisted passage into the elevator.

Stairs present an insurmountable barrier for persons using a wheelchair or walking aid. If stairs must be used to access the voting area, the stairs must be ramped, free of obstacles, well lit, and provided with risers, the little vertical walls at the back of

the steps that insure that one does not catch their foot causing a serious fall. Step depth and height can play a part in preventing accidents.

Narrow passageways along the path of travel to the voting area may present an insurmountable barrier for persons using a wheelchair or walking aid. A minimum width of 36" for passageways should be maintained.

DOORS

Doors into the facility containing the polling site and along the path of travel to the voting area may pose a barrier to voters with disabilities. The accessible path of travel from the entrance into the facility containing the polling site to the voting area must have accessible doors. Accessible doors should have a clear width of 32" to allow entrance for an individual in a wheelchair or with a walking aid. Doorways with less than a clear width of 32", but measuring 32" or more between stops, can be made accessible by temporarily removing the door or remounting the door on special offset hinges.

Door hardware that requires twisting may present a barrier for an individual with impaired dexterity. Door hardware such as arch handles, lever type handles, push plates, or automatic openers should be used and placed no higher than 48" above the ground.

Door thresholds might create a barrier for voters in a wheelchair or using a walking aide, if the threshold is too high or abrupt. The threshold should be less than 1/2" high and beveled to allow ease of passage. If a threshold is over 1/2" high, it may need to be ramped to allow passage.

OTHER FEATURES WITHIN THE VOTING AREA

Providing such amenities as magnifying devices for the visually impaired, sufficient lighting, notepads and pencils for voters who are hearing or speech impaired, and large type printed instructions within the voting area may eliminate or reduce a voter's need for assistance. Other courtesies that might be provided include seating for the elderly or disabled waiting their turn to vote, and a non-rolling chair.